DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 549 EC 303 137

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TITLE Career Development for the Gifted and Talented.
PUB DATE Sep 92
NOTE 5p.; In: Images in Transition; see EC 303 125.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acceleration (Education); *Career Development; *Career Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Gifted; Interpersonal Competence; Problem Solving; *Program Development; Self Concept; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Self Management; Student Educational Objectives; Time Management

ABSTRACT

This paper on career education for gifted and talented students addresses the following issues: multipotentiality versus pressure toward early specialization, expectations of significant others, differences in career lifestyles, required investments of time and money and resulting deferred family life, mobility demands possibly leading to alienation of an individual from his/her home community, and requirements of innovativeness in "inventing" one's career. Efforts to meet the career development needs of gifted students must include seven components: (1) content acceleration, (2) development of self-awareness, (3) building of a secure self-concept, (4) development of effective interpersonal skills, (5) training in creative problem solving, (6) fostering awareness of sex role factors, and (7) development of skills in stress management and time management. (DB)

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PROCEEDINGS - SAGE 1992 / 6TH CANADIAN SYMPOSIUM

ED 371 549

Career Development for the Gifted and Talented

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Issues in Career Education for the Gifted

The professional literature on career education for the gifted suggests that career development programs must address the following issues: (a) multipotentiality, (b) expectations, (c) lifestyle, (d) investment, (e) mobility, and (f) innovativeness. The following sections will provide a brief overview of each of these issues.

Multipotentiality. One of the difficult problems is that of multipotentiality. Many gifted students are capable of succeeding at whatever career they choose. In addition to having the aptitude to succeed, gifted students tend to have a diversity of interests. Since early specialization is a correlate of eminence, there is a tendency for parents and teachers to exert pressure on a child to specialize as soon as possible. Such pressure is likely to create tension for the gifted individual. The key challenge is to provide educational experiences that will enable an individual to be "competitive" in terms of the content of a discipline without prematurely channelling the individual.

Expectations. The expectations of significant others (parents, teachers, and peers) can exert tremendous pressures for gifted individuals. Some children may be overwhelmed by constant exposure and reinforcement for considering particular careers such as law or medicine. Other children may have great difficulties convincing their parents that higher education is a legitimate pursuit. Certain cultural groups are likely to value geographic proximity as an important determinant of career choice. It is also likely that sex-role socialization beliefs lead to differential expectations for males and females.

Lifestyle. Although the media may promote glamorous visions of many careers, reality entails more sobering visions. Each career involves a unique lifestyle. Some lifestyle considerations include: (a) the hours one works, (b) the clothes one wears,

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(c) the people one associates with, (d) the amount of time spent with family, (e) the amount of travelling one does, and (f) use of leisure time. The congruence between lifestyle demands and lifestyle preferences is likely to affect potential job satisfaction. Individuals must identify their own lifestyle preference and experience the lifestyle demands of various careers.

Investment. The educational preparation required for entry into most professional fields is extensive. Such preparation involves great financial and time commitments. Unless one is independently wealthy, the postponement of parenthood and possibly marriage seems a practical choice. Due to socialization experiences and expectations, the decision to defer family life until some career goals are met is more difficult for females than males. Since people tend to marry others of similar educational levels, the number of potential spouses decreases as one's educational level increases. Given such great demands, the challenge is to find ways of helping individuals mobilize their energy to overcome obstacles and/or find ways to alleviate as many of the barriers as possible.

Mobility. The types of occupations that many gifted individuals aspire to are likely to force them to leave their home community to seek training experiences and jobs. This can be a very painful experience for individuals when parental sanctions and cultural values denigrate this choice. Changes in social class standing, which may accompany educational and occupational attainment, can lead to lifestyle changes that alienate an individual from one's home community. This alienation is compounded when exposure to pluralistic value systems decreases uncritical acceptance of the monistic systems in which one was raised; leading to further separation from one's parents and home community.

Innovativeness. Many currently-available career options are the direct result of the inventiveness of gifted individuals. The field of biochemical engineering did not exist until someone combined interests in biology, mechanics and engineering. Such combinations require greater investments than focusing on just one career. As technological breakthroughs make new careers possible, it is important to prepare individuals to "invent" their careers if necessary.

Career Development Components

The following sections will briefly describe seven components that I view as essential if the career development needs of the gifted are to be met. Although the components are presented linearly, they are conceptualized as being interrelated and dynamically influencing each other.

Content acceleration. One of the easiest ways of shortening the heavy time and financial sacrifices that professional aspirations require, is to permit individuals to accelerate their educational programs. Accelerative possibilities include early entrance to college, part-time college coursework, advanced placement, subject-matter acceleration and grade skipping. Research indicates that accelerative practices are extremely beneficial for gifted students.

Self-awareness. Standardized personality tests can be used to help individuals identify their interests. A student's profile on a measure such as Vocational Preference Inventory will provide information about the individual's differentiation of interest. Directive counselling can be implemented once interests re differentiated. Testing can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of self-awareness training.

Self-concept. A secure self-concept has been viewed as a critical component for the development of eminence. One needs a positive self-image to cope with the expectations, investment demands, and mobility factors that high aspirations entail. Self-concept measures can be used as part of the self-awareness component. A great variety of materials have been developed to enhance self concept.

Interpersonal effectiveness. Since self-concept is greatly influenced by an individual's family interactions, it is important to develop an effective style of communicating. Skills such as self-disclosure, empathy, warmth, social relaxation, assertiveness, interaction management, descriptiveness, sensitivity to feelings, flexibility, and relationship stage skills are characteristic of competent communicators.

Creative problem-solving. Training in creative problem-solving can help individuals cope with the investment and mobility problems. The creative problem-solving process consists of five steps: (a) fact-finding, (b) problem-finding, (c) idea-

finding, (d) solution-finding, and (e) acceptance-finding. The process involves an oscillation between divergent thinking, a listing of many brainstormed alternatives, and convergent thinking, focusing on the correct answer.

Sex-role awareness. Special effort should be made to eliminate arbitrary sex-role stereotyping. Techniques as direct communication and education on the negative impact of sex-role stereotyping, career decision-making simulations, exposure to role models, formation of support groups, same-sex career days. The interpersonal skills component will help individuals interact assertively with others.

Stress-time management. Current focus on career burnout indicates a need to provide individuals with stress and time management strategies. Stress can be alleviated through progressive relaxation and environmental sounds. Time management strategies enable gifted students to set priorities.